

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT OBSERVER

A Monthly Magazine of IDN-InDepthNews in association with INPS Southeast Asia

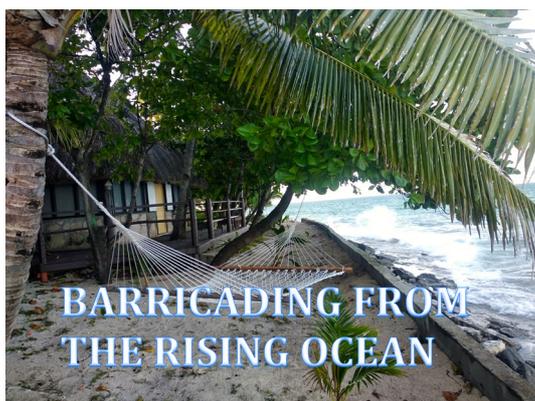
IDN-InDepthNews
Analysis That Matters

Flagship Agency of the Non-profit International Press Syndicate



SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT OBSERVER ISSUE 11 JULY 2022

LIFE BELOW IMPACTS ON LIFE ABOVE BLUE OCEANS AND SDG 14



When we see the Earth from space, we truly appreciate that we live on a blue planet. The ocean connects us all. Sadly, we have taken the ocean for granted, and today we face what I would call an "Ocean Emergency". We must turn the tide - UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres's Opening Address to World Ocean Conference in Lisbon



FROM THE EDITOR

Addressing the World Oceans Conference in Lisbon, United Nation's Secretary General Antonio Guterres warned that the world is facing an "Ocean Emergency".

He listed some of the threats facing the Oceans thus: "Low-lying island nations face inundation, as do many major coastal cities in the world. The climate crisis is also making the ocean more acidic, which is disrupting the marine food chain. Ever more coral reefs are bleaching and dying. Coastal ecosystems, such as mangroves, seagrasses and wetlands, are being degraded. Pollution from land is creating vast coastal dead zones. Nearly 80 per cent of wastewater is discharged into the sea without treatment. And some 8 million tons of plastic waste enter the oceans ever year". Also unsubstantiated fishing practices and over fishing is rampant he added, warning, "we cannot have a healthy planet without a healthy ocean".

In an article in this issue we focus on the adoption of the "2050 Blue Pacific Strategy" by leaders of the South Pacific Forum this month, and also we look at the pledges made at the UN Ocean Conference in Lisbon.

In another article published in this issue, Dr Palitha Kohona, who co-chaired the UN adhoc Working Group on Biological Diversity Beyond National Jurisdiction address the challenges confronting the Oceans today. "The Oceans cover 71 % of the globe. Over 3 billion people depend on the oceans, directly and indirectly, for their livelihood. There is more biological diversity in a bucket of seawater than in hectares and hectares of dry land" he points out. "Life began in the ocean and the ocean continues to support life. We depend on the ocean for more things than we can imagine. Not only by being the biggest sink for carbon dioxide, but the ocean also provides the protein intake for more than 50% of the world's population, especially in the poorer countries. But today the oceans are in distress".

In our special feature focusing on global inequalities, we look at a campaign by a group of Sri Lankan intellectuals and civil society activists for an appeal to listen to "Southern Voices" with a call for Debt Justice, Debt Jubilee and Debt Cancellation.

Dr Kalinga Seneviratne - Editor



Issue 11 – July 2022
Bringing You Stories and Issues Relevant
To Achieving The SDGs in The
Post-COVID Era

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Naval Officers leading the World Ocean Day March in Suva. Photo Credit: Kalinga Seneviratne

South Pacific Plans Coordinated Action at UN Ocean Conference

By Kalinga Seneviratne

SUVA, Fiji — This week, to coincide with the World Ocean Day (WOD) on June 8, South Pacific’s experts and stakeholders on the Oceans met here to plan coordinated action at the United Nations Oceans Conference starting in Lisbon on June 28.

Speaking at a WOD event here on June 8, Fiji’s Fisheries Minister Semi Koroilavesau said that the enormous scale of the challenges facing the oceans today can no longer be ignored. “We are not the only ones that hold the future of our ocean in our hands. The entire world must also do its part and that is the greater challenge that calls us for greater commitment and awareness from us all,” he noted.

The Pacific Ocean spans approximately 41 million square kilometres and for most of the small Pacific Island Countries (PICs) under the Law of the Sea Convention¹ they own larger areas of the sea than landmass. Thus, the ocean is critical to their livelihoods and their identity.

Protecting and nurturing the oceans forms Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 14—Life Below Water—that calls to conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources. The South Pacific region fought hard to achieve this stand-alone goal on the oceans adopted within the 2030 agenda for SDGs. Thus this week’s two-day gathering—in person and online—organised by the Pacific Ocean Alliance (POA) was designed to build a coordinated campaign at the forthcoming UN Oceans Conference to give more prominence to SDG 14 that has been pushed to the corners as the world tries to rebuilt from the COVID-19 pandemic.

The POA was launched at the 2014 Small Island Developing States (SIDS) meeting in Apia, Samoa. It is a multi-stakeholder grouping of Pacific Island Countries constituting private sector and civil society organisations, academic and research institutions, development partners and international organisations.

The two-day meeting was held at the secretariat of the inter-governmental regional body Pacific Island Forum (PIF) which also acts as Office of the Pacific Ocean Commissioner (OPOC) that facilitates POA. The PIF secretary general Henry Puna (a former Prime Minister of Cook islands) acts as the commissioner as well.

¹ See for full document - https://www.un.org/depts/los/convention_agreements/texts/unclos/unclos_e.pdf

In opening remarks to the meeting, Puna said that the PICs face both threats and opportunities due to the geo-political battle hotting up in the South Pacific—he did not name countries. “These challenges impact on our ability to protect our oceans” he said. “It is only by political commitment that we can capitalise on opportunities and resources the ocean provides”.

The PICs will be presenting their 2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent that will develop a long-term vision for the region and it outline the steps to achieve this vision. It is a regional strategy to protect and secure the Pacific people, place and prospects.

“Our fisheries resources are vital for our people and the world. We provide more than 50 per cent of the global supply (and) it is critical to look after this resource for the world” Puna added, pointing out that the Blue Pacific strategy is designed to do that. He added a cautionary note saying that “we need to discuss here the sustainable management of our resources—not based on other’s needs”.

UN Secretary-General’s Special Envoy on the Oceans, Peter Thompson addressing the meeting here by video acknowledged that SDG 14 was adopted through the “determined” efforts of the South Pacific, and at this stage “we should not surrender to the forces of greed and exploitation”. He suggested that there should be a concentrated effort to stop pollution of the oceans by plastics and climatic finance need to be targeted at goals like SDG 14. He advocates that the ‘Blue Pacific’ strategy needs to infiltrate all SDGs and the international community “should not squander this year’s opportunity to save the oceans”.

While the 2050 Strategy for Blue Pacific is vital, Thompson believes that this needs resources and both the POA meeting and UN Ocean Conference need to address the issue of resourcing—both in governance and financing – to operationalise the strategy.

Dr Josie Tamate, Director General of the Ministry of National Resources from Nieu told the meeting that addressing the issue of funding is very important to realise the ‘Blue Pacific’ strategy, and she mentioned a \$32 million trust fund that has been established calling out to bilateral donors to contribute. She also added another scheme of Ocean Conservation Credit would be proposed at the PIF leaders’ summit in July, that would involve a 20-year commitment from international contributors.

Addressing the POA meeting through zoom link, Sainivadati Novoti, Chief of the SIDS department at the UN in New York, argued that while health and military conflicts have diverted the world’s attention from SDGs recently, in terms of realising the SDG 14 under the ‘Blue Pacific’ strategy, a serious impediment is a lack of reliable data from the region. When asked by IDN if this is a “cop out by the UN?” he refuted it strongly pointing out that they are working with regional partner to overcome this “data gap”.

Addressing the WOD event indigenous community leader Adi Kolokesa Latianara from Serua Island said “with climate change effects intensifying and causing more coral bleaching, our oceans and its resources have been greatly affected. Life is getting harder as our marine resources are declining, we are catching less fish with sizes also decreasing. There’s more pollution evident, and with expensive fuel prices, we now have to go further out of our fishing grounds to find a good catch”.

Nevertheless, she said they could help to implement the Marine Protection Area within their communities and encourage youth to get involved “by cultivating sea urchings, mollusks and sea cucumber near the shore to promote growth and replenishment of such species”. She also recommends the use of solar powered boats. But to achieve these aims, Latianara emphasised that there needs to be regional (and international) cooperation.

“The main concern is whether our (international) partners are coming (to Lisbon) with open ears to listen for our call to action” Semisi Seruitanoa, membership officer of the International Union for Conservation of Nature told IDN. He pointed out that the Pacific has been asking for quite a

while for greater financial resources to be allocated for conserving the oceans. He believes that the Pacific has ample data but the problem is on interpreting these.

“We are the leading region in the world that has almost completed the EEZ (Exclusive Economic Zone) boundaries (and) one of the leading regions with the marine protection areas,” added Seruitanoa. But he pointed out that the capacity to do surveillance of these areas to stop illegal activity is hampered by the lack of financial resources. “China has recently helped in providing surveillance equipment and training of naval officers,” he added.

Speaking to IDN at the end of the WOD march here, young indigenous woman Maima Vaai of Uto Ni Yalo Trust said, “we indigenous people are the custodians that have been given the role to protect and care for our oceans and our land. Not only for us but also for our future generations that are to come”. [Transmitted on IDN-InDepthNews — 09 June 2022]



Life below - the Red Sea's reef is one of the longest continuous living reefs in the world.
Photo Credit: Unsplash/Francesco Ungaro

A Tide of Pledges at the UN Ocean Conference in Lisbon

By Ramesh Jaura

BERLIN | LISBON — The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) has pledged to enable 100 coastal countries including all Small Island Developing States to realize the maximum potential of their blue economies through sustainable, low-emission and climate-resilient ocean action by 2030.

This commitment made at the five-day UN Ocean Conference, which concluded in the Portuguese capital on July 1, is particularly important because Official Development Assistance (ODA) to the ocean economy over the last ten years has averaged only US \$1.3 billion per year. But the scale of public and private investment for ocean restoration and protection remains woefully inadequate.

UNDP's Ocean Promise on June 28 underscores that every penny invested in achieving the Paris Agreement is a penny invested in ocean health - the foundation of the sustainable blue economy. The Promise outlines actions in key sectors to accelerate economic growth, create jobs and livelihoods, improve food security, reduce poverty and inequity, and promote gender equality.

"The Ocean Promise is our blue economy vision that emphasizes the restoration of the nearly \$1 trillion in annual socioeconomic losses due to ocean mismanagement. The promise is also about helping countries to tap into new and emerging ocean sectors for increased ocean-related socio-economic opportunities," stated Usha Rao-Monari, Under-Secretary-General and Associate Administrator at UNDP.

"We will continue to work across issues and scales, from local to global, in close partnership with governments, UN agency partners, intergovernmental organizations, NGOs, communities and the private sector, towards accelerating progress on Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 14. The ocean is a vital buffer against the impacts of climate change - saving our ocean means protecting our future."

As the UNDP points out, SDG 14 remains the most underfunded goal yet holds immense potential to be a game changer in addressing the triple planetary crisis. In a business-as-usual fossil fuel use scenario, many ocean species and ecosystems, and the food security and livelihoods of billions of people face existential threats. With only 8 years to go until 2030, the time to act is now: UNDP's Ocean Promise aims to catalyse significant progress on SDG 14 implementation.

More than 6,000 participants, including 24 Heads of State and Government from more than 150 countries, and over 2,000 representatives of civil society attended the UN Conference (June 27-July 1), advocating for urgent and concrete actions to tackle the ocean crisis. They decided to scale up science-based and innovative actions to address the ocean emergency.

This agreement, together with bold commitments from all sectors of society - youth, civil society, businesses and the scientific community - clearly demonstrates the centrality of a safe, healthy and productive ocean to food security, livelihoods and a safe planet, UN sources said.

Under-Secretary-General for Legal Affairs and United Nations Legal Counsel Miguel de Serpa Soares said in his closing remarks: "The Conference has been an enormous success. It has given us the opportunity to highlight critical issues and generate new ideas and commitments. But it has also shed light on the work that remains, and the need to scale this up and raise ambition for the recovery of our ocean."

From rising sea levels and marine pollution to ocean acidification and habitat loss, the planet's largest biodiversity reservoir is in jeopardy, threatening to derail progress on SDG14, the key roadmap for global action on life below water. Moreover, there is threat of cumulative human impacts on the ocean - the lungs of our planet. If not curtailed, it will exacerbate the climate emergency, and hinder the aspirations of the Paris Agreement.

Ocean-based economies have also been deeply affected by the COVID-19 pandemic and there were many setbacks in ocean management, monitoring and science. The multidimensional food, energy and finance crisis is further aggravating the fallout and weakening people's ability to cope.

But restoring the health of our ocean can be part of the solution. Resilient and healthy oceans are the foundations of climate regulation and sustainable development, with the potential to produce food and energy for billions.

The Conference also heard many success stories with many initiatives showcased demonstrating how stakeholders can come together to transition towards a sustainable ocean economy and, as a result, improve biodiversity, community livelihoods and climate resilience.

In addition, the Conference succeeded in translating ideas into action with a host of new commitments made by many countries and stakeholders. Close to 700 commitments were registered, adding to the substantial commitments made at the 2017 UN Ocean Conference. These commitments showcase the critical need for innovation and science to revitalize the ocean.

2022 - Super Year for the Ocean

2022 has also become a super year for the ocean with a number of key breakthroughs with the Ocean Conference introducing a new chapter on ocean action. The UN Environment Assembly in March consensually agreed to begin negotiations for a binding global treaty to end plastic pollution.

UN sources note that last month, the World Trade Organization succeeded in reaching general consensus on banning harmful fisheries subsidies. This year's Intergovernmental Conference on Marine Biodiversity of Areas Beyond National Jurisdiction could also lead to strengthening governance of the high seas. Besides, later this year, the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity (COP 15) is an opportunity to achieve a new target to protect 30 per cent of the planet's lands and seas by 2030. UNFCCC COP 27, to take place in November, will see a focus on climate adaptation measures and financing required to build ocean resilience.

Political Declaration

The Conference also saw the unanimous adoption of the Lisbon Declaration, a suite of science-based and innovative actions, taking into account the capacity challenges facing developing countries, in particular, Small Island Developing States and Least Developing Countries, at the frontline of the devastating impacts of the ocean emergency.

Countries agreed on actions ranging from strengthening data collection, recognizing the role of indigenous people in sharing innovation and practices to reducing greenhouse gas emissions from international maritime transportation, especially shipping. They also agreed to promote innovative financing solutions to achieve sustainable ocean-based economies and encourage women and girls' meaningful participation in the ocean-based economy.

"Going forward, it will be important that we renew our focus on ocean action. We need to do this by focusing on improving the scientific basis for our decisions, by improving the science-policy interface, and by engaging in scientific partnerships that build capacity through mutual learning," said UN Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs and Secretary-General of the Conference, Liu Zhenmin.

Voluntary Commitments Snapshot

Investments

- The Protecting Our Planet Challenge will invest at least USD 1 billion to support the creation, expansion and management of marine protected area and Indigenous and locally governed marine and coastal areas by 2030.
- The European Investment Bank will extend an additional EUR 150 million across the Caribbean Region as part of the Clean Oceans Initiative to improve climate resilience, water management and solid waste management.
- The Global Environment Facility approved a \$25 million grant towards Colombia's marine protected areas.
- The Development Bank of Latin America announced a voluntary commitment of USD 1.2 billion to support projects to benefit the ocean in the region.
- Ocean Risk and Resilience Action Alliance announced a multimillion-dollar global search for the next generation of projects to build resilience of coastal communities and finance through finance and insurance products.

Marine Protected Areas and Pollution

- Portugal committed to ensure that 100% of the marine area under Portuguese sovereignty or jurisdiction is assessed as being in Good Environmental State and classify 30% of the national marine areas by 2030.
- Kenya is currently developing a national blue economy strategic plan, inclusive and multistakeholder-oriented. Kenya also committed to developing a national action plan on sea-based marine plastic litter.
- India committed to a Coastal Clean Seas Campaign and will work toward a ban on single use plastics, beginning with plastic bags.

Science and Innovation

- Sweden will support enhanced scientific cooperation, including by providing USD 400,000 in 2022 to IOC UNESCO for the UN Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development in support of work on SDG 14 target 3.
- The Alliance of Small Island Developing States launched the Declaration for the Enhancement of Marine Scientific Knowledge, Research Capacity and Transfer of Marine Technology to Small Island Developing States.

Climate Action

- USA and Norway announced a Green Shipping Challenge for COP 27.
- Singapore is also championing green shipping, encouraging carbon accounting by shipping companies, and research on low-carbon maritime fuels.
- Chile is working with specialized centres to develop a network of green corridors for maritime transport in order to achieve zero-carbon shipping.

[Transmitted by IDN-InDepthNews – 02 July 2022]

** This article was produced as a part of the joint media project between The Non-profit International Press Syndicate Group and Soka Gakkai International in Consultative Status with ECOSOC on 02 July 2022.*

Pacific Leaders Endorse '2050 Strategy of the Blue Pacific'

Pledge to Promote "Accountable" Development

By Sera Tikotikovatu-Sefeti

SUVA, Fiji — The leaders of the Pacific gathering for the first time in three years endorsed the 2050 Strategy for a Blue Pacific at the 51st Pacific Island Forum (PIF) from July 11 to July 14.



The Group of Summit leaders. Photo Credit: Sera Tikotikovatu-Sefeti

"The success of this strategy is down to two things, and that is first, the leaders take accountability, and secondly, the people also be accountable for it, " said Fiji's Prime Minister Josaia Voreqe Bainimarama, who chaired the PIF meeting.

The strategy focuses on seven key thematic areas: political leadership and regionalism, people-centred development, peace and security, resources and economic development, climate change and disasters, ocean and environment, and finally, technology and connectivity.

The strategy took almost three years of planning and engagement with various stakeholders, including civil society organisations across the region, taking part in the process. This carefully laid out strategy highlighted some key areas of concern and implementation guidelines to ensure it trickles down to society.

The term "regionalism" was used often during the event addressing the geopolitical presence of foreign countries and other pressing issues requiring a united front across the region from Pacific leaders. "The retreat is the perfect opportunity for us leaders to discuss, debate, and find a solution to pressing issues that otherwise cannot be discussed publicly," said Samoan Prime Minister Fiame Naomi Mataáfa reflecting on the importance of face-to-face dialogue.

According to the Pacific Islands Association of Non-governmental Organizations (PIANGO) Deputy Executive Director, Josaia Osbourne, the civil society organisations' community members were engaged during the planning phase of the strategy. "We have been included in the

discussion for the past three years, and we have high hope that the strategy can work if we all work together," he told IDN.

Osbourne sees it as a positive sign when people involved with the community are given room on the decision table to voice their concerns and suggestions to ensure any plans trickle down to the community members.

At the launch of the 2050 Strategy of the Blue Pacific Continent², Bainimarama said, "It is a matter of precedent, and it is certainly about our future." It is how we work together as communities, as countries, or as one Blue Pacific continent. "The 2050 strategy is about what we share in common, our challenges and our opportunities," he added.

The strategic people-driven approach has a comprehensive plan to ensure that the proposed (now endorsed) strategy can be relatable to work already in place on the ground. It looks at the present situation around the thematic areas to see what initiatives, plans, issues, and solutions are currently in place. This is followed by the five strategic pathways: partnership and cooperation; resilience and wellbeing; education; research and technology; inclusions; and equity and governance. Finally, it will look at the level of ambition expected from each thematic area.

The regionalism advisor for the Pacific Islands Forum, Joel Nilon, emphasised that at the heart of these thematic areas is the ocean and that we live surrounded by the blue Pacific Ocean. "The 2050 strategy for the Blue Pacific continent was born out of the need for us to take a more strategic and long-term response to challenges in the environment around us," Nilon told IDN.

"It is in response to the leaders' call in 2019 for the strategy to be developed in response to climate change and existing challenges, as well as the intensification of geopolitical rivalry in our region," he added.

According to Nilon, non-state actors such as regional international civil society, the private sector, and members of CROP (Council of Regional Organisation of the Pacific) agencies have helped guide the strategy's development.

This new people-centred approach could be the answer to ensuring that each member involved in the drafting of the strategy will take ownership and ensure that its implementation is enforced and monitored. Thus, according to the General Secretary of the Pacific Conference of Churches, the Rev. James Bhagwan, "it's incredibly important for us that this strategy works. It's the first time we've been involved in this, and we know that it can only be a success if everyone works together and plays their part".

Nilon echoed this message. "It is important that we come together and work more closely together," he argues. "We have our numerous strengths; our people, our youth, our cultures offer us natural resilience and social protection, and we have significant natural resources."

The 2050 Strategy of the Blue Pacific continent was endorsed and fully supported by the regional leaders, and various non-state actors are already planning the implementation to ensure its success.

"And within this context, we need a long-term strategic approach to guide how we work together, how we cooperate as countries, and, of course, how we interact with the outside world," Nilon says. [Transmitted by IDN-InDepthNews – 22 July 2022]

** This article was produced as a part of the joint media project between The Non-profit International Press Syndicate Group and Soka Gakkai International in Consultative Status with ECOSOC on 22 July 2022.*

² For more information see - <https://www.forumsec.org/2050strategy/>



HIGH-LEVEL POLITICAL FORUM ON SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

The World is in Deep Trouble and the Sustainable Development Goals in Jeopardy

By Thalif Deen

UNITED NATIONS — The warnings came from the highest echelons of the United Nations, from UN Secretary-General António Guterres and President of the 193-member General Assembly Abdulla Shahid.

The message was clear: the UN's 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) desperately need help for their very survival, eight years ahead of their 2030 deadline for full implementation.

Addressing a ministerial meeting of the three-day High-Level Political Forum (HLPF) on SDGs on July 13-15, Guterres remarked: "Our world is in deep trouble—and so are the Sustainable Development Goals."

Some 94 countries, home to 1.6 billion people, face a perfect storm: dramatic increases in the price of food and energy and a lack of access to finance.

"And so, there is a real risk of multiple famines this year. Next year could be even worse if fertilizer shortages affect the harvests of staple crops, including rice," he cautioned.

"Time is running out. But there is still hope," he said, "because we know what we need to do."

If you want the SDGs to be reality, he said, "end the senseless, disastrous wars - now. Unleash a renewable energy revolution - now. Invest in people and build a new social contract - now. And deliver a New Global Deal to rebalance power and financial resources and enable all developing countries to invest in the SDGs."

Let's come together, starting today, with ambition, resolve and solidarity, to rescue the SDGs before it is too late, he declared.

The ripple effects of Russia's invasion of Ukraine have hit amid a fragile and uneven recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic, while the climate emergency is gathering pace.

But the lingering question remained: Will the world's rich nations - and warring parties - respond to this appeal for help?

Shahid, President of the UN's highest policy-making body, was equally concerned about the current state of faltering SDGs. "The volume, magnitude, and scale of complex challenges to sustainable development are arguably both unprecedented and unrelenting. From deepening climate change and regional conflicts, to rising inequality and food insecurity, the challenges we face threaten to derail the goals and targets of the 2030 Agenda."

Yet, there is hope; hope that together "we can not only pull through but come out stronger, more resilient, and more sustainable", he noted.

According to *The Sustainable Development Goals Report 2022*, released by the United Nations on July 7, the climate crisis, the COVID-19 pandemic and an increased number of conflicts around the world have placed the 17 SDGs in jeopardy.

The Report highlighted the severity and magnitude of the challenges facing, mostly developing nations, with cascading and intersecting crises creating spin-off impacts on food and nutrition, health, education, the environment, and peace and security, and affecting all the SDGs, the blueprint for more resilient, peaceful and equal societies.

The HLPF, attended by more than 125 heads of state and deputy heads of state, along with more than 2,000 ministers, high-ranking officials and other registered participants, is described as the central platform for follow-up and review of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the SDGs.

The meeting, whose theme was "*Empowering people and ensuring inclusiveness and equality*," focused on six of the 17 goals which were reviewed in-depth:

- [Goal 4](#). Ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education and promoting lifelong learning opportunities for all
- [Goal 8](#). Promoting sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all
- [Goal 10](#). Reducing inequality within and among countries
- [Goal 13](#). Taking urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts
- [Goal 16](#). Promoting peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, providing access to justice for all and building effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels
- [Goal 17](#). Strengthening the means of implementation and revitalizing the global partnership for sustainable development

The ministerial segment of the meeting, convened under the auspices of the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) took place July 13-15 with the adoption of a declaration.

Collen Vixen Kelapile, President of ECOSOC, told delegates: "As the world is struggling to recover from COVID-19 amidst continuing crises, the HLPF will reflect on how recovery policies can overcome the crises, reverse the negative impacts of the pandemic on the SDGs and move countries on to a path to realize the vision of the 2030 Agenda."

Stefan Schweinfest, Director of the Statistics Division in the United Nation's Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA), said the COVID-19 pandemic halted or reversed years of development progress.

As of 2021, nearly 15 million people worldwide have died directly or indirectly due to COVID-19. More than four years of progress in alleviating extreme poverty have been wiped out, and 150 million more people facing hunger in 2021 than in 2019.

Over the past two years, an estimated 147 million children missed more than half of their in-person instruction. The pandemic severely disrupted essential health services. Immunization coverage dropped for the first time in a decade and deaths from tuberculosis and malaria increased.

As grim as the scenario sounds, he said, "We shall set a course for achieving the implementation of the 2030 Agenda through recovery and response: enact new ways of thinking and open up new possibilities".

In addition, before the pandemic, progress was being made on many important SDGs, such as reducing poverty, improving maternal and child health, increasing access to electricity, improving access to water and sanitation, and advancing gender equality.

As the SDG Report 2022 underscores the severity and magnitude of the challenges before us, this requires accelerated global-scale action committed to and following the SDG roadmap.

“We know the solutions and we have the roadmap to guide us in weathering the storm and coming out stronger and better together,” said Schweinfest.

Achim Steiner, the Administrator of the UN Development Programme (UNDP), said: “Unprecedented price surges mean that for many people across the world, the food that they could afford yesterday is no longer attainable today. This cost-of-living crisis is tipping millions of people into poverty and even starvation at breathtaking speed, and with that, the threat of increased social unrest grows by the day.”

He pointed out that policymakers responding to the cost-of-living crisis face difficult choices, particularly in poorer nations. The challenge is how to balance meaningful short-term relief to poor and vulnerable households at a moment when most developing countries are struggling with shrinking fiscal space and ballooning debt.

“We are witnessing an alarming growing divergence in the global economy as entire developing countries face the threat of being left behind as they struggle to contend with the continuing COVID-19 pandemic, crushing debt levels and now an accelerating food and energy crisis”, said Steiner.

“Yet new international efforts can take the wind out of this vicious economic cycle, saving lives and livelihoods—that includes decisive debt relief measures; keeping international supply chains open; and coordinated action to ensure that some of the world’s most marginalized communities can access affordable food and energy.”

The final declaration adopted after the meeting, included the following observations and commitments by the 193 member states:

We strongly reaffirm our commitment to the full implementation of the 2030 Agenda and its Sustainable Development Goals, recognizing it as the blueprint for an inclusive, sustainable and resilient recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic and accelerating the decade of action and delivery for sustainable development, leaving no one behind.

We are gravely concerned that, for the first time in decades, the global poverty rate has increased, and millions have been pushed back into extreme poverty.

We further reaffirm the importance of achieving global food security and express deep concern over the drastic increase in hunger, malnutrition and food insecurity, increasing the risk of famine around the world, especially in developing countries.

We reiterate our commitment to reach the furthest behind first, as the pandemic and the deteriorating global economic situation are harming especially the poorest and most vulnerable and have direct consequences on the implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

We reaffirm that there can be no sustainable development without peace and no peace without sustainable development. We are gravely concerned, in this regard, by the increased and ongoing conflicts in the world, which are affecting global peace and security, respect for human rights and sustainable development. We call for full respect for the principles of the Charter of the United Nations and international law and condemn any violation of those principles and law. [Transmitted by IDN-InDepthNews – 18 July 2022]

** This article was produced as a part of the joint media project between The Non-profit International Press Syndicate Group and Soka Gakkai International in Consultative Status with ECOSOC on 18 July 2022.*



Beach adjacent to the University of the South Pacific. Photo Credit: Kim Rabuka.

Fijian Activist Educates Youth on Upcycling Marine Debris

By Kim Rabuka

SUVA — Suzanne Turaganiwai, a marine activist and ocean advocate is educating youths and communities on how to manage waste to keep the environment clean. The 29-year-old manages the marine debris activism account on Instagram called 'benu ni waitui'.

"It's looking at highlighting the impacts of marine pollution on the environment and also to showcase the different items that wash up here on the beaches in Suva. Also upcycling these items into art and a sort of advocate for the cleaner ocean for Fiji," she told *Wansolwara*.

Suzanne holds activism workshops with various organizations in the hopes of sparking conversations that lead to actions for a cleaner environment.

It was during the second pandemic wave last year (exactly one year ago) that Suzanne decided to give a go on this movement.

"I just happened to be one of the lucky staff that were allowed to come back onto campus during the lockdown, and I spent most of my free time just coming to the beach collecting things, so I just decided to do something about the rubbish problem that you see here," she said. "Also, I have a background in marine science, so that sort of added to the value of work that I was doing."



Suzanne Turaganiwai
Photo Credit: Kim Rabuka

Suzanne is also a graphic designer and artist and says it makes sense to do something creative with the clean-ups."

Building Environmental Community

"I had the time last year to do it, and it's getting busier now with things going back to normal," Suzanne highlights. "In a way, it has improved because there are more people involved and I sort of built a community of people working every week to clean the environment."

"Like I share the news about what and when we collect on my social media pages for interested people," she explained. "We have some students, some staff, some members from outside the USP

(University of the South Pacific) community that come in to help as there are no fees required for this."

Suzanne says they are looking to engage more students on campus in extracurricular activities involving clean-ups and data collection at USP foreshore and also participate in activities such as upcycling marine litter into art and advocacy.

Arts Project with Litter

"Some more interesting pieces like the pegs and bottle tops are used for art projects. These items also included toys, but recyclables like bottles and plastic bags are sorted out with the team and sent to the recyclers or keep them ourselves and take it to Mission Pacific," explained Suzanne. "Last week, we had an ocean festival that the Pacific Council of Churches organized. And we participated by having a mural-making thing where kids came and got their hands into the rubbish and did some artwork."

Planning For the Future

For the remaining half of the year, Suzanne plans to conduct activism workshops and an exhibition of art pieces of marine debris.

"We're also hoping to engage further into more communities, especially with the work we are doing at Pacific Ocean Litter Youth Project," she said. "Right now, we're focused on one site, that is here at USP foreshore, but we're hoping to expand to some rural areas or some semi-urban sites just to look at the different types of litter coming in and do more advocacy work."

"We are looking to pull in more youths and women especially into these kinds of projects because activism is sort of like your arts and craft, and I'm sure women would be interested in taking up that skill or even benefit and sell their creations."

Suzanne's Advice

"My message would be to live a bit more sustainably. It may be hard to live that way in the city but do your research, read about ways in which you can minimize your carbon footprint and change your lifestyle a bit because the way that we are living, the path that we're on and have been going on for the past few decades have always been about consumption," she told *Wansolwara*.

Suzanne adds that people do not realize the amount of waste that is being made.

"Like the products that we buy, the services that we use, it's always just more of this, never thinking about the output of our actions. So (we need to) take a step back and slow down," says the young sustainable living activist.

"For the young people looking to upskill their talents and passions, do not be afraid to step out of your comfort zone," says Suzanne. "Talk to the right people. Only then will you find your way in whatever niche you're in or activities you want to pursue". [Transmitted by IDN-InDepthNews – 01 July 2022]

** Kim Rabuka is a third-year journalism student from Fiji at the University of the South Pacific. This story is transmitted as part of the agreement between the university's student newspaper Wansolwara and IDN-InDepthNews.*



Underwater Seascapes. Photo Credit: Anders Nyberg

Addressing the Challenges Confronting the Oceans

Viewpoint by Dr Palitha Kohona

BEIJING — I was the co-chair, along with Dr Liesbeth Lijnzaad of the Netherlands, of the United Nations ad hoc Working Group on Biological Diversity Beyond National Jurisdiction (BBNJ). Since handing over our conclusions and recommendations in 2015, a negotiating process has begun with a view to finalizing a Treaty on Biological Diversity³ Beyond National Jurisdiction, also referred to as a High Seas Treaty.

We are also dealing with this subject at a time when the world is nervously staring into the threatening abyss of a major global economic crisis which is demanding all our attention.

Economies have shrunk, growth has slowed and, in many cases, gone in to reverse, unemployment is rising, supply chains have been disrupted and the dreaded spectre of inflation is looming. A disruptive military confrontation has erupted in Europe.

The supply of food and energy is causing global concern, with yawning hunger becoming a chilling concern. The IMF expects the global growth to slump to 3.6%. But China will continue to grow at around 4.4%.

This crisis is threatening to overwhelm many of us. It is not only the poor who are most threatened, relatively wealthy countries are also affected. 69–70 countries are seriously in trouble at this point and, according to the IMF, 37 may require bailouts. The situation has been exacerbated by the unforgiving and vicious hand of the COVID–19 pandemic - which has certainly taken its bitter toll, not only in terms of human life and health, but also on the economies of many countries.

³ For more information go to - <https://www.cbd.int/>

We are approaching the UN Ocean Conference on the conservation and sustainable utilisation of marine diversity against this difficult and challenging background. The economic crisis is distracting us, the world, from other pressing demands.

The Oceans cover 71 % of the globe. Over 3 billion people depend on the oceans, directly and indirectly, for their livelihood. There is more biological diversity in a bucket of seawater than in hectares and hectares of dry land. Life began in the ocean and the ocean continues to support life.

We depend on the ocean for more things than we can imagine. Not only by being the biggest sink for carbon dioxide, but the ocean also provides the protein intake for more than 50% of the world's population, especially in the poorer countries.

But today the oceans are in distress. The over-exploitation of fishing grounds has brought many species of marine life to the brink of extinction. Illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing has been a problem and 33% of fish species are under serious threat.

Some fisheries have collapsed. (eg. the once prolific cod fishery of New Foundland and the anchovy fishery of Peru). Ocean acidification has increased. The oceans have become warmer, contributing to coral bleach, migration of fish away from usual habitats, and pollution, especially with massive quantities of plastics accumulating in the high seas. Global warming is causing sea-level rise, threatening low-lying coastal areas and small island states.

Even areas of the high seas, historically teeming with life, are now vulnerable to growing threats, including pollution, over-exploitation, and the impacts already visible of climate change.

The increasing demand for marine resources in the coming decades—for food, minerals and biotechnology—threatens to exacerbate this problem. While there have been extensive scientific explorations of the surface water of the high seas, the deep sea i.e. below 200 meters of the surface has hardly been studied.

In this circumstance, it has become our sacred duty to ensure that the oceans are protected and conserved. Today we need to assign more areas in the oceans to be protected because they also constitute the spawning grounds for endless varieties of ocean life. They are the ocean's nurseries. These are the areas that will help the oceans to recuperate and rejuvenate.

Ocean-based genetic resources already provide raw materials for a large number of drugs, including cancer treatment drugs. Increasingly, more and more patents are based on ocean genetic resources.

There are other drugs that are likely to be discovered as science learns more and understands the oceans better. 84% of patents based on marine genetic resources are owned by private companies. Public and private universities accounted for another 12%, while entities such as governmental bodies, individuals, hospitals, and non-profit research institutes registered the remaining 4%.

The world's largest chemical manufacturer, the German BASF, held nearly 47% of the patent sequences. The second and third largest companies were based in Japan and the US, respectively. They are likely to resist any effort to regulate their activities.

Humanity has made efforts in recent times to introduce some regulation to human activity relating to the oceans. In addition to the Law of the Sea Convention 1982 (sometimes referred to as the Constitution of the Oceans) and its associated implementing agreements, the 1995 United Nations Fish Stocks Agreement and the 1994 Agreement relating to the Implementation of Part XI, the international community has begun to negotiate a further implementing agreement on the high seas.

The UN GA adopted resolution 72/249 on 24 December 24, 2017, and convened an Intergovernmental Conference, under the auspices of the United Nations, to consider the recommendations of the Preparatory Committee established by resolution 69/292 of 19 June 2015 to identify the elements and to elaborate the text of an international legally binding instrument under the United Nations Convention on the Law of Sea on the conservation and sustainable use of marine biological diversity of areas beyond national jurisdiction.

The Preparatory Committee had before it the report of the UN Ad Hoc Working Group on the conservation and sustainable use of marine biological diversity of areas beyond national jurisdiction co-chaired by Dr Palitha Kohona of Sri Lanka (currently Sri Lanka's Ambassador to China) and Judge Dr Liesbeth Lijnzaad (now a Judge of the Law of the Sea Tribunal). 61% of the oceans lie beyond national jurisdiction.

The Committee held a three-day organizational meeting in New York, in April 2018, to discuss organizational matters, including the process for the preparation of the zero draft of the instrument. Four sessions have been convened so far.

A fifth session of the Conference is being convened from 15 to 26 August 2022 pursuant to General Assembly resolution 76/564 (available as A/76/L.46).

The proposed "BBNJ Treaty", the "Treaty of the High Seas", will be an international agreement and will fall within the framework of the United Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS).

It will seek to achieve more holistic management of high seas activities, which is expected to better balance the conservation and sustainable use of marine resources and also address the issue of benefits sharing.

There have been some welcome developments in the negotiations. The U.S. for example has recognized a high seas treaty as a vital part of 30x30. There is growing recognition that the high seas must be part of the solution to protect at least 30% of our global oceans by 2030, the SDG target year.

The United States delegate Monica Medina has said that "the conclusion of a strong and effective BBNJ agreement is a priority for the United States." Ursula von der Leyen, President of the European Commission, announced that a coalition of 40+ countries was committed to securing an ambitious high seas treaty in 2022.

A high seas treaty must also recognize the vital role of fish in marine ecosystems. 86% of high seas fishing is done by only five countries and other entities: China, Chinese Taipei, Japan, South Korea, and Spain. Protected MPAs have been shown to benefit fish stocks. Sustainable seafood suppliers and retailers have been supportive of a strong high seas treaty.

Benefit-sharing, which has caused resistance among the technologically advanced nations, could be approached in a practical manner. Whether mandatory or voluntary, benefit-sharing measures could be carried out on a monetary and/or non-monetary basis, and the overarching principles governing the future international legally binding instrument, in particular, the common heritage of humankind and the freedom of the high seas could be covered.

As the global economic crisis intensifies, many financial mechanisms are being explored, in particular, to assist the poorer countries. I would like to suggest that some of these new financial resources be allocated for ocean-related activities of developing countries.

They could be used for improved and sustainable fishing, contributing to reducing poverty, generating employment and conserving biological diversity, better training, assisting with creating better job opportunities and improving livelihoods, sustainable aquaculture, ensuring sustainable food supplies, and better storage and marketing and the transfer of technology.

At least the recovery from the economic crisis, from which we will recover sooner than later, could be utilized to assist the ocean and those who depend on the ocean. We need to turn this crisis into an opportunity that will serve humanity well in the future.

I also recall the suggestion, that an equitable part of the wealth that will be generated by exploiting ocean biodiversity could be shared equitably with the developing world based on the concept of the Common Heritage of Mankind. This concept has been around for some time now.

The Common Heritage of Mankind principle, consolidated in the context of the Law of the Sea Convention, recognizes that users must not appropriate the resources of the deep seas; the resources must remain accessible to all, and the benefits of exploitation must be shared equitably.

The parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity 1992 (there are 196 parties) have committed themselves to the “fair and equitable sharing of the benefits arising from the utilization of genetic resources”. The Nagoya Protocol on Access to Genetic Resources and the Fair and Equitable Sharing of Benefits Arising from Their Utilization, of the Convention on Biological Diversity 2010, takes the concept forward.

To borrow from the Chinese saying, “If you give a man a fish, he will live for a day; But if you teach him to fish, you give him a life”. [Transmitted by IDN-InDepthNews on 24 June 2022]



Life under the Sea. Photo Credit: UNESCAP

‘Ocean Action’ Vital for the Asian and Pacific Countries

Viewpoint by Armida Salsiah Alisjahbana*

BANGKOK — As the Second Global Ocean Conference opens today in Lisbon, governments in Asia and the Pacific must seize the opportunity to enhance cooperation and solidarity to address a host of challenges that endanger what is a lifeline for millions of people in the region.

If done right ocean action will also be climate action but this will require working in concert on a few fronts.

First, we must invest in and support science and technology to produce key solutions. Strengthening science-policy interfaces to bridge practitioners and policymakers contributes to a sound understanding of ocean-climate synergies, thereby enabling better policy design, an

important priority of the Indonesian Presidency of the G20 process. Additionally policy support tools can assist governments in identifying and prioritizing actions through policy and SDG tracking and scenarios development.

We must also make the invisible visible through ocean data: just three of ten targets for the goal on life below water are measurable in Asia and the Pacific. Better data is the foundation of better policies and collective action. The Global Ocean Accounts Partnership (GOAP)⁴ is an innovative multi-stakeholder collective established to enable countries and other stakeholders to go beyond GDP and to measure and manage progress towards ocean sustainable development.

Solutions for low-carbon maritime transport are also a key part of the transition to decarbonization by the middle of the century. Countries in Asia and the Pacific recognized this when adopting a new Regional Action Programme⁵ last December, putting more emphasis on such concrete steps as innovative shipping technologies, cooperation on green shipping corridors and more efficient use of existing port infrastructure and facilities to make this ambition a reality.

Finally, aligning finance with our ocean, climate and broader SDG aspirations provides a crucial foundation for all of our action. Blue bonds are an attractive instrument both for governments interested in raising funds for ocean conservation and for investors interested in contributing to sustainable development in addition to obtaining a return for their investment.

These actions and others are steps towards ensuring the viability of several of the region's key ocean-based economic sectors, such as seaborne trade, tourism and fisheries. An estimated 50 to 80 per cent of all life on Earth is found under the ocean surface. Seven of every 10 fish caught around the globe comes from Pacific waters. And we know that the oceans and coasts are also vital allies in the fight against climate change, with coastal systems such as mangroves, salt marshes and seagrass meadows at the frontline of climate change, absorbing carbon at rates of up to 50 times those of the same area of tropical forest.

But the health of the oceans in Asia and the Pacific is in serious decline: rampant pollution, destructive and illegal fishing practices, inadequate marine governance and continued urbanization along coastlines have destroyed 40 per cent of the coral reefs and approximately 60 per cent of the coastal mangroves, while fish stocks continue to decline and consumption patterns remain unsustainable.

These and other pressures exacerbate climate-induced ocean acidification and warming and weaken the capacity of oceans to mitigate the impacts of climate change. Global climate change is also contributing to sea-level rise, which affects coastal and island communities severely, resulting in greater disaster risk, internal displacement and international migration.

To promote concerted action, ESCAP, in collaboration with partner UN agencies, provides a regional platform in support of SDG14, aligned within the framework of the UN Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development (2021-2030). Through four editions so far of the Asia-Pacific Day for the Ocean, we also support countries in identifying and putting in place solutions and accelerated actions through regional dialogue and cooperation.

It is abundantly clear there can be no healthy planet without a healthy ocean. Our leaders meeting in Lisbon must step up efforts to protect the ocean and its precious resources and to build sustainable blue economies. [IDN-InDepthNews – 27 June 2022]

** Armida Salsiah Alisjahbana is an Under-Secretary-General of the United Nations and Executive Secretary of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP).*

⁴ For more information, go to - <https://www.oceanaccounts.org/>

⁵ See https://www.unescap.org/sites/default/d8files/event-documents/L5_0.pdf



Without land, Bangladesh's Manta people live - and die - on boats

Eroding Bangladeshi rivers stole their land - and now climate change and overfishing threaten the life they have built on water. Today, Begum's entire community - known as the Manta people - live aboard small boats on two of the nation's major rivers. It's a challenging way to survive - but one more Bangladeshi may be driven to adopt as climate change and sea-level rise speed land erosion.

Source: Eco-Business (Singapore) <https://www.eco-business.com/news/without-land-bangladeshs-manta-people-live-and-die-on-boats/>

Food and energy inflation has pushed 71 million people into poverty: UNDP

Over the past three months, 71 million people have fallen into poverty because of spiking food and energy prices, made worse by the Russian invasion of Ukraine, the United Nations warns. The countries seeing the worst impacts include low-income nations but also middle-income countries that depend on imports, according to a report published by the U.N. Development Programme on Thursday. The inflation problem is moving "faster than the shock of the COVID-19 pandemic" and has led to the "largest cost-of-living crisis in a generation," UNDP Administrator Achim Steiner told reporters ahead of the report's launch.



Source: devex - <https://www.devex.com/news/food-and-energy-inflation-has-pushed-71m-people-into-poverty-undp-103588>

Noise pollution from deep-sea mining could wreck marine life, study warns

Noise from a single mine could travel 500km, new research finds. Noise pollution could ruin habitats for bottom-dwelling creatures that use sound to feed and communicate. Scientists are calling for further scrutiny of mining regulations.

Source: Eco-Business (Singapore) <https://www.eco-business.com/news/noise-pollution-from-deep-sea-mining-could-wreck-marine-life-study-warns/>

Thailand paves way for countries like the UK to limit disastrous bottom trawling



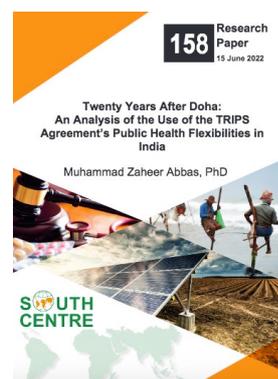
Thailand announced a moratorium on new licences for vessels that engage in one of the most destructive fishing practices on 1 July. The country revealed that it will permanently ban new licences for bottom trawlers at an event at the UN Ocean Conference. Bottom trawling amounts for 26% of all marine fishing around the world, according to a 2021 report by Fauna & Flora International and others. It is widely

recognised as being disastrous for wildlife and many small-scale fishers.

Source: The Canary - <https://www.thecanary.co/global/world-analysis/2022/07/05/thailand-paves-way-for-countries-like-the-uk-to-limit-disastrous-bottom-trawling/>

Twenty Years After Doha: An Analysis of the Use of the TRIPS Agreement's Public Health Flexibilities in India

The World Trade Organization (WTO) linked intellectual property protection with trade. The WTO Agreement on Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS Agreement), however, included a number of public health flexibilities in order to provide latitude to the Member States to tailor their national patent laws to fit their individual needs. In 2001, the Doha Declaration further clarified and reaffirmed the existing TRIPS flexibilities. This paper argues that India has taken the lead role in enacting the TRIPS Agreement's substantive and procedural patent flexibilities by introducing unique legislative measures to deal with the problem of access to medicines. This article evaluates India's use of section 3(d) as a subject matter exclusivity provision. It examines constitutional validity and TRIPS compliance of section 3(d). It also evaluates India's use of the flexibility to define the term "inventive step". Moreover, this article evaluates India's use of compulsory licensing, the most notable exception to patent rights provided under the TRIPS Agreement. This empirical study is important in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, which has once again highlighted the same public health issues that the Doha Declaration sought to address twenty years ago.



Source: South Center (Geneva) - Download from - https://www.southcentre.int/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/RP158_Twenty-Years-After-Doha.-An-Analysis-of-the-Use-of-the-TRIPS-Agreements-Public-Health-Flexibilities-in-India_EN.pdf

Doha Twenty Years On - Has The Promise Been Betrayed?



The Doha Declaration's twentieth anniversary in November 2021 has taken place in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic. The experience of the past two years has demonstrated that the very factors that necessitated the Declaration - the problems of inequitable access to medicines and other health technologies for the world's poor—continue to plague us. Has the promise of the Doha Declaration been betrayed? In this contribution, we critically engage with this question, focusing our appraisal on whether the Doha Declaration has been successful in fulfilling its commitments to: (a) advancing access to health; (b) equity and fairness in the relations between WTO Members States; and (c) recognising perspectives from the developing world in formulating IP policy. Ultimately, we conclude that the promise of the Doha Declaration has failed to materialise. There are many reasons for this. For instance, developed country governments have intentionally undermined the Declaration by their insistence on inserting more onerous TRIPS-plus provisions in free trade agreements and economic partnership agreements, which decimate the limited flexibilities permitted by the TRIPS Agreement. And where countries have sought to use such flexibilities, they have been assailed by an over-litigious pharmaceutical industry, and threats by governments such as the US 301 Watch List. For these reasons, we argue for the need for alternative paradigms to

challenge Western hegemony and norms regarding IP and other trade-related issues, and for effectively challenging this through the application of a "decoloniality" approach. Source: South Center (Geneva)- download from https://www.southcentre.int/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/SV238_220620-3.pdf



Sri Lanka: Southern Voices to be Heeded - A Call for Debt Justice, Debt Jubilee and Debt Cancellation

COLOMBO — The Coalition for Economic Democracy in Sri Lanka (CEDSL) is a group of concerned academics, activists, agricultural, fisheries and industrial workers, students, businesspersons, trade unionists, and professionals based 'in country' and overseas, including the diaspora, who uphold the values of economic rights and justice in public policy making.

In the wake of two years of economically devastating Covid-19 lockdowns, quantitative easing, and money printing globally, we call on international actors to heed the people's demands for a DEBT JUBILEE and CANCELLATION as a priority.

We wish to draw your attention to key issues regarding the current debt crisis and its social, political and economic impacts which are not adequately represented in public discussion, yet are crucial to the well-being and security of Sri Lanka's citizenry.

A Call for Debt Justice

International support is welcome to ease the economic burden on the people of Sri Lanka which includes shortages of fuel, food and medicines that impact livelihoods and health, increasing poverty and inequality. However, due to an International Sovereign Bond (ISB), debt trap and depreciation of the Sri Lankan rupee against the US dollar, sustainable solutions are needed rather than the short-term sale of strategic assets that benefits ISB holders and hedge funds that sustain dependent development.

In May/June 2022 Sri Lanka's debt was estimated to be US\$51 billion with current debts of US\$5 billion to be paid to ISB holders and hedge funds like BlackRock. They secured huge United States (US) government 'Covid-19 bailout' funds to asset-strip and impoverish countries around the world during the economically devastating Covid-19 lockdowns.

Contrary to widespread media disinformation about the sources of debt and the causes of default, this is the first time that Sri Lanka, in April of this year, defaulted as an independent state. It is the debt owed to ISBs that amounts to almost 50% that has caused the default at this time.

The Asian Development Bank and World Bank have indicated willingness to roll over their multilateral debt, and so too the bi-lateral debt holding Asian countries including Japan, China and India. Along with debt cancellation there is a need for de-dollarization and trading in a basket of currencies. The loss of such autonomy and sovereignty due to the ISB debt tap and the

International Monetary Fund (IMF) stepping in to devalue the currency is at the root of the current shortage of food, fuel, meds, fertilizer, gas, etc. The purported shortage of 'exorbitantly privileged' dollars is the most devastating impact of the entire "staged" default.

While the return of stolen assets by the Rajapaksa family, some of who are US citizens, is vital, we believe that there is an even greater need for DEBT JUSTICE, a DEBT JUBILEE, and DEBT CANCELLATION as the current international financial architecture is not fit for purpose, particularly, the IMF which works for the global 1 per cent and imposes austerity on the rest.

Sri Lanka-IMF Negotiations Inherently Unequal

The gross lack of transparency in ongoing negotiations between the IMF and a government that lacks legitimacy but purports to represent the citizens is a consequence of an inherently unequal relationship between Sri Lanka and the IMF, where the US and former European colonial powers have overwhelming decision-making power. While the IMF demands 'transparency' and that all creditors be treated 'equally', the names of the ISB holders behind Sri Lanka's default are a closely guarded secret!

In 2019, Sri Lanka was classified by the World Bank as an Upper Middle-Income Country (MIC), making it ineligible for concessionary development loans, and forcing it to borrow from private capital markets at high-interest rates. The new government that came to power cut taxes causing a significant loss of government revenue. The 2019 Easter bombings and policies undertaken during two years of militarized Covid-19 lockdowns and mass injections have triggered the current debt crisis leading to the staged default.

Though in 2019, Sri Lanka was classified by the World Bank as an Upper Middle-Income Country (MIC), just three years later in 2022 certain international actors want Sri Lanka to be re-classified a Least Developed Country (LDC), and the island to join the world's poorest of the poor[1] - in Washington Consensus parlance, a "Highly Indebted Poor Country" (HIPC).

LDC status will mean a significant loss of economic and foreign policy autonomy and sovereignty at a time when it is vital that Sri Lanka and other developing countries act in their own self-interest rather than be forced to join geostrategic blocs that are being formed in the Indian Ocean region such as the QUAD at this time of Cold War 2.0.

We consider that the people's sovereignty and national policy autonomy are being undermined through non-transparent deals with politicians who are not democratically elected and have a history of amassing 'odious debt', the burden of which citizens are being forced to bear. Particularly notable on the accumulation of odious debt are the current odious, newly appointed Prime Minister, implicated in the country's biggest financial fraud over the Central Bank bond scam, and the President, a US citizen until 2019, whose family wallows in nepotism. They are now negotiating with the IMF to sell national assets!

There is a clear pattern of disinformation, exaggeration and fear-generation regarding Sri Lanka's debt in local and global media messaging. This understates the intrinsic Wealth of the Nation, its strategic assets, and the strengths of this country given the failure to differentiate between illiquidity and insolvency in the context of a proposed IMF fire sale of assets and State-Owned Enterprises (SOEs).

The IMF's traditional approach to debt restructuring through privatization of SOEs, austerity measures, and fire sale of assets of countries merely causes more problems and places the burden on the poor as is evident from Argentina to Greece and Lebanon. However, odious debt is an outcome of speculative and reckless ISB lending sans due diligence to governments that lack legitimacy and are known to be corrupt. In fact, the IMF which works for the Global 1 per cent is a part of the problem and not the solution. So too are processes of datafication, manipulation of matrices, indices and algorithms to ensure 'pumping and dumping' of countries into the MIC debt trap, LDC or HIPC status and Paris Club 'solutions' of asset stripping of countries.

Southern People's Voices to Be Heeded

The bailout of the country should not lead to bailing out of the corrupt political and bureaucratic elites and related oligarchs whose policies, corrupt governance and deals have caused the present crisis of unprecedented scale in our country. The international institutions and people in Sri Lanka should work together to ensure that these elites are held accountable and appropriately dealt with.

There is an urgent need for Southern voices and perspectives in development, debt cancellation and debt justice in the International Aid Architecture as many countries in the Global South face a similar situation of odious debt as an outcome of speculative and reckless lending by ISB traders who must be also held accountable⁶.

The demand of many Sri Lankans is for debt cancellation and de-dollarization and trading in a basket of currencies, not IMF re-structuring; for example, to enable the purchase of discounted oil and gas from sanctions-hit Russia perhaps in exchange for tea. Sri Lanka should have the economic and foreign policy sovereignty to source its needs from any country that offers good value for money.

A firm "No" to an IMF fire sale of strategic assets and asset stripping: A list has already been prepared of strategic lands, airports, ports, transport, telecom frequencies and energy infrastructure to be privatized. The dastardly sale of the Yugadhanavi power plant to the US-based New Fortress has already further compromised national energy security and policy sovereignty and autonomy.

Today the interests of Sri Lanka are being represented by foreign law firms, Lazard and Clifford Chance in so-called IMF negotiations with ISB traders. On numerous occasions, Lazard, which has been involved in both advising on privatisation and then profiting from its advice, has undervalued the price of state companies, enabling its asset management branch to purchase the stock at low prices and resell it for a considerable profit⁷.

If the debt negotiations are so complex that Sri Lankan law firms and accountants cannot represent the interests of the citizens of the country, and the debt data is itself contested, the debt is odious, its holders unknown, and the negotiations none-transparent. Then the fundamental question arises regarding the legitimacy, transparency and accountability of the very process of so-called IMF negotiations. Such concerns were also raised in IMF negotiations in Greece, Lebanon, Argentina and other countries.

The United Nations Charter and international law affirm the Right of Peoples to Self-Determination and permanent sovereignty over their wealth, resources and economic activity as a precondition for the realisation of all human rights. So too, principles of sovereignty and independence of states, equality in relations with other states, and national policy-making autonomy cannot be eroded by global Covid-19 and other 'pandemic' and climate catastrophe narratives.

Sustainable Solutions

We seek much more than debt relief and demand DEBT JUSTICE. While the crisis in Sri Lanka is being framed as a "humanitarian disaster" it is quite clear that it is more complex with economic, political, social and geopolitical dimensions and dynamics⁸. Solutions must hence be duly

⁶ See Cf. OXFAM report "Inequality Kills"

⁷ See 'The Privatization Industry in Europe' by Sol Trumbo Vila and Matthijs Peters Transnational Institute - https://www.tni.org/files/publication-downloads/tni_privatising_industry_in_europe.pdf

⁸ See A new Quad Humanitarian and Disaster Relief Mechanism (HADR) - http://www.colombopage.com/archive_22A/Jun15_1655268284CH.php

designed, tailored and targeted to improve the lives of the most vulnerable and to restore sovereignty to the people of Sri Lanka and their State.

1. We demand a DEBT JUBILEE and to write off the odious debts held by ISB debt holders like BlackRock (that also holds Adani stock), that engage in reckless lending that has debt trapped several countries including Sri Lanka. Covid-19 saw the greatest transfer of wealth in human history from the bottom of the economic ladder to the top.
2. We call on the Government to urgently begin a process of de-dollarization and trade in a basket of currencies in order to restore Sri Lanka's monetary sovereignty and pursue a course of development that promotes South-South cooperation and responds to the needs and aspirations of the Sri Lankan citizenry. The relevance of the current International Development Architecture for Sri Lanka and other debt-trapped countries in the Global South must be questioned. Sri Lanka needs to reconsider its relations with institutions like the IMF, WB, OECD, and Paris Club of Donors in a manner that affirms, not dismantles, its sovereignty and policy autonomy, both exercising the ability to negotiate as an independent country free of IMF conditionality and US sanctions and working in the interests of its citizens.
3. We call on the Government to immediately stop all initiatives and actions underway for the privatisation of strategic assets, including lands, airports, ports, telecom frequencies, transport and energy infrastructure and reverse all actions already commenced or implemented as valuations did not consider the island's geostrategic value and security concerns.

We call on the Government to develop a National Energy & Food Security Policy taking full cognisance of the current global energy wars, geopolitics and 'climate catastrophe' discourses that force small states to bear the carbon costs of the Global Military Business Industrial Complex. Of utmost importance in ensuring food security is the maintenance of food supply chains, and prioritization of fuel for the Fisheries and Agriculture sectors in the context of fuel rationing; rationalization of taxation, and targeting the wealthy – to enable the most vulnerable groups such as farmers, fishers precarious workers in the informal sector, and small and medium-term enterprises to regain their livelihoods. In the absence of such a policy, climate narratives like the rush to "green energy" and organic fertilizer without an adequate transition plan and transfer of technology given the island's tiny carbon footprint has contributed significantly to the current fuel, food and economic crisis in Sri Lanka and in other parts of the Global South.

4. The strengthening of governance and government institutions is paramount to address the effects of Covid-19 lockdowns which gave rise to a pandemic of corruption and a lack of accountability due to national institutions and oversight agencies being debilitated under the guise of lockdowns, holidays due to staged fuel shortages, de-centralization and inept digitalization. Services like public transport can be improved through more energy-efficient and environment-friendly measures, including the abolishing of duty-free car permits for politicians and the privileged 'professional' class. Finally, there is an urgent need for a "Buy local" State-led consumer education program so that citizens support local industry and manufacturers.

[Transmitted by IDN In-Depth News on 3 July 2022]

Sustainable Development Observer is a product of INPS Southeast Asia
in association with IDN-In Depth News
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